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Mid-term review of the fifth country programme for Bangladesh

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I. THE MID-TERM REVIEW PROCESS

1. The mid-term review of the fifth country programme for Bangladesh was undertaken between November 1993 and July 1994 by the Government and UNDP with participation from United Nations agencies with the aim of ascertaining the continuing relevance of the programme, examining the progress of implementation, and determining measures to further enhance impact. The results include minor modifications to the objectives, agreement on the need for better programme focus and concentration, and a set of concrete recommendations for more precise targeting of beneficiaries, and monitoring and implementation of UNDP cooperation for the remainder of the programme. The Government, UNDP and United Nations agencies have highly valued the joint review process, and are well-satisfied with the outcome and conclusions of the mid-term review meeting held on 26 to 27 July 1994.

2. Coinciding with the Government's fourth five-year plan (1991-1995) the country programme was approved by the Governing Council at its thirty-eighth session (1991) for the four-year period 1991 to 1995. The mid-term review process commenced in November 1993 and culminated in a two-day meeting held on 26 to 27 July 1994. A team of national consultants was initially recruited by the Government and UNDP to prepare a set of background assessment papers. These papers, along with the inputs received from a wide variety of sources (including United Nations agency and project personnel) culminated in the preparation of a draft joint issues paper. The paper was shared with Ministries and Departments of Government, UNDP headquarters, United Nations agencies, and select multilateral and bilateral donors prior to the meeting. The paper was widely recognized for its frank and insightful presentation of the key issues identified by the Government and UNDP. The Government and UNDP further convened two task forces to review options for resolving the issues identified in the paper and to elaborate further key recommendations. The findings of the task forces were also tabled in the review meeting, participants of which included representatives from the Government's key coordinating and line ministries, UNDP representatives from headquarters and the country office and United Nations executing agencies. Other United Nations agencies as well as select bilateral donors were present as observers.

3. Fully recognizing that implementation of the Review's recommendations are integral to the success of the mid-term review process, the Government and UNDP are taking immediate steps to ensure joint follow-up action. The Government and UNDP fully appreciate the value of the review in initiating preparatory work on the next country programme, which is scheduled to start in July 1995.

II. PROGRAMME ACHIEVEMENTS

A. Continuing relevance of the programme

4. When the programme was formulated, three objectives were identified in line with the emphasis placed by the Government in the five-year plan on a more human-centred approach to development through growth with equity. They were: (a) poverty alleviation and participation in development; (b) environmental and

natural resources management; and (c) economic management and administrative reform. The overview of financial resources and the current status of financial commitment and programming against these three objectives are given in annex 1.

5. Since the preparation of the programme, Bangladesh has returned to a democratic Government, increasingly liberalized its economy and afforded ever-greater priority to issues of sustainable human development. At the same time, it continues to face serious constraints to development, including a high incidence of poverty stemming from a rapidly growing population on a land base that is already the most densely populated in the world and vulnerable to natural disasters, and from accelerating environmental degradation. These changes and constraints are presenting dynamic, new challenges for the Government and its people as well as its development partners.

6. The mid-term review has concluded that the programme objectives, with two slight adjustments, remain as relevant today as in 1991. It is recognized, however, that participatory development (the second half of the first original objective) should characterize the mode in which all three programme objectives are to be pursued. As such, it is appropriate to consider it as an underlying and pervasive theme for the entire programme and not confine it to the first objective.

7. Poverty alleviation continues as the primary goal of the Government, reflecting, among other things, current thinking on development in South Asia as articulated, for example, in the recent South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) pronouncement on pro-poor planning. Poverty alleviation thus remains a highly appropriate programme objective.

8. The second programme objective, environment and natural resource management, is today more universally recognized as being necessary to sustain development than when the programme was prepared. The objective remains particularly valid, given the high population growth of Bangladesh, worsening resource balance trends and vulnerability to frequent natural disasters.

9. The third programme objective, economic management and administrative reform, has been recast as public management since the latter term not only selectively embraces the former two concepts but also encompasses intervention aimed at other aspects of governance, for example, equity and effectiveness. With the return of democracy in Bangladesh, the UNDP mandate, neutrality and comparative advantage make it well placed to provide needed support in this area.

B. Programme concentration and focus

10. At the end of 1993, IPF-funded projects in Bangladesh numbered 111, scattered across 15 different sectors with a budget of roughly $87 million. The large number of projects and diverse coverage with very few interlinkages have diffused the impact of this assistance while imposing a considerable administrative burden on both the Government and the country office. In reviewing the programme content against each of the three objectives, the mid-term review has identified the need for sharper definition, concentration

and focus, along with the more effective targeting of intended beneficiaries (especially the chronically poor and women) to improve the impact and efficiency of UNDP cooperation.

11. Programming for the first objective, poverty alleviation, although substantial, has been less than originally envisaged (see annex I, part II). It has also been widely dispersed among six different subprogramming areas: employment, education, population, health and nutrition, infrastructure, and local-level participation.

12. Programming in areas other than the above against this objective have tended to be national interventions. It became apparent in the review process that interventions should be more clearly focused at local and community levels to ensure better access to and involvement of the intended beneficiaries. It was decided not to continue UNDP technical cooperation in physical infrastructure improvement in view of the relative comparative advantage of other donors in this area and the mass of unmet needs in areas where UNDP does have comparative advantage. This reduced emphasis does not, however, affect United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF) financing, which is increasingly being re-oriented towards poverty alleviation. UNCDF will continue to have infrastructure as a programming focus along with poverty alleviation. Combating HIV/AIDS has also become an important element in poverty alleviation.

13. Programming for the second objective, environment and natural resource management, has been higher than anticipated although the formulation of intended environmental interventions has been slow. The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) saw the commitment of many countries, including that of Bangladesh, to preserving the productivity of the planet's limited resources through the implementation of Agenda 21, the Convention on Climate Change and the Convention on Biological Diversity, and the Forest Principles. In the wake of the Conference, the Government gave renewed attention to making its environment policy operational through the formulation of a national environment management action plan, supported by UNDP, and the drafting of new environmental legislation. Completion of the national environment management action plan over the next few months should provide a framework for substantive programming. In the area of forest management and conservation, the Government has recently completed and approved a national forestry master plan with support from the Asian Development Bank (AsDB), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and UNDP aimed at reversing the degradation and decline of forest resources in the country. The plan is in line with the Forest Principles emerging from UNCED. The first Global Environment Facility (GEF) grant proposal for Bangladesh has recently been approved for biodiversity preservation and integrated coastal zone management, and a country study on the use of ozone depleting substances has identified key areas of support for further funding under the Multilateral Fund of the Montreal Protocol.

14. Programming against the third objective, renamed "public management", has yielded a mixture of projects with few substantive linkages. UNDP programme interventions should focus more selectively on a few key areas in future for which UNDP has comparative advantage. Emerging programming areas include public

administrative reforms, national participatory planning, and local government development.

15. As a means of operationalizing the decision to concentrate and sharpen the focus of the programme, the use of specific selection criteria as a guideline in the screening and appraisal of new projects has been accepted. The criteria (attached as annex II) reflect the following top sustainable human development priorities for UNDP cooperation with Bangladesh: relevance to country programme objectives; institutional and social sustainability; environmental sensitivity; targeting of the chronically poor; affirmative action for women; public management; participation of beneficiaries and private organizations; and national execution. The criteria will be applied in formulating, appraising and approving substantive revisions to ongoing projects as well as in formulating, appraising and approving new projects and programmes. They will also be taken into consideration in conducting tripartite reviews and evaluations.

16. A second strategy for programme concentration is for UNDP technical cooperation to move away from areas in which it has little comparative advantage and where other donors are seen to be playing a more prominent role (e.g., physical infrastructure and economic management).

17. Greater use of the programme approach is another means identified for programme concentration through focusing on a smaller number of larger interventions. To date, the projects Education Management Information System (BGD/90/009) and Primary Education Reform (BGD/88/040) have been dovetailed with the General Education Programme of the Government. As the programme approach is the preferred modality for the future programming of UNDP cooperation, the Government and UNDP will be further exploring how best to operationalize its use in the context of Bangladesh.

C. Capacity-building

18. The UNDP global mission is to assist programme countries in their endeavour to realize sustainable human development in line with their national development programmes and priorities by providing technical support for building national capacity for sustainable human development. National capacity-building, therefore, represents an underlying theme of the country programme. The principal target of UNDP capacity-building efforts in Bangladesh has been the strengthening of central Government institutions. However, in examining ongoing programme interventions, particularly in support of the poverty alleviation objective it is recognized that capacity-building activities need to move much closer to the ultimate beneficiaries (namely the poorest female segments of the population) with the aim of more actively empowering them in development. It was agreed that such efforts should effectively be undertaken in collaboration with local government, civil society and community-based groups, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other private organizations.

19. Inadequacies in the public administration, both at the national as well as the local level, serve as an impediment to public investment and service delivery. Further programming against programme objective three, public management, is expected to follow from the ongoing review of recommended public

administrative reforms as well as full implementation of local Government reforms.

20. More rigorous attention will be given to securing the necessary conditions for capacity-building within Government and other institutions where such assistance is being provided with a view to ensuring longer-term sustainability.

D. Gender in development

21. Despite a stated intention to integrate gender-in-development concerns throughout the programme, projects formulated and implemented have by and large not been successful in mainstreaming these activities. A gender analysis reveals that women continue to account for between 10 to 20 per cent of all expert services provided under the programme. Similar figures appear when training programmes are examined. Very few projects have explicit affirmative action programmes or meaningfully target women as intended beneficiaries.

22. To redress these gender disparities, the mid-term review agreed on a series of concrete, affirmative actions as well as mechanisms for operationalizing them: (a) line Ministry focal points for gender in development are to be involved in project formulation; (b) performance criteria for gender in development and a gender-sensitive baseline survey are to be incorporated into project documents, with guidelines for identifying them to be developed by an expert group; (c) where gender-in-development information is unavailable, formulation missions are to include expertise to conduct the baseline survey; (d) gender-in-development focal points are to formulate project-specific criteria, in consultation with gender-in-development experts as necessary; and (e) gender-in-development focal points are to be trained in preparing surveys and criteria.

23. Actions to improve the monitoring, evaluation and implementation of gender-in-development issues include: (a) establishment of a gender-in-development unit in the Planning Commission to monitor and analyse project performance on WID issues; (b) explicit review of gender-in-development concerns in project performance and evaluation reports, tripartite reviews and evaluations; (c) joint reviews of UNDP-funded projects by the Government and UNDP to ensure that actions in support of gender-in-development concerns are incorporated into project workplans; (d) publicity for opportunities for women's participation in projects through information networks accessible to women; and (e) introduction of gender-sensitive components in project staff and training modules.

24. Agreed affirmative actions include: (a) recruitment panels for UNDP-funded projects to have at least one woman member; (b) advertisements for UNDP-funded posts to include a pro-WID statement; (c) efforts to be made under ongoing UNDP-funded projects to increase the number of women recruited by 20 per cent. For new projects, at least 35 per cent of recruits are to be women; and (d) efforts to be made under ongoing UNDP-funded training programmes to increase the proportion of women by 25 per cent. For new projects, at least 35 per cent of trainees are to be women.

III. PROGRAMME MANAGEMENT

A. National execution

25. National execution has been the first choice of execution modality from the beginning of the programme. The percentage of nationally executed projects under indicative planning figure (IPF) funding has gone from 7.6 per cent in 1991 to 12.6 per cent in 1993. In mid-1994, 21 per cent of total IPF resources and 27 per cent of projects were being nationally executed. The Government and UNDP are pleased to note the steady increase in the use of this modality in Bangladesh although the original target of 60 per cent will not be achieved by mid-1995.

26. The implementation of projects to be nationally executed continues to suffer from overall weaknesses in work programming, and project reporting and monitoring. Recognizing that managerial capabilities, motivation and continuity of National Project Directors are critical to the success of these projects, training is to continue as a key area for UNDP support. This capacity-building effort will include: (a) a series of workshops for Government officials both at senior and working-levels as well as for UNDP and United Nations agency staff;
(b) completion of the draft manual for National Project Directors;
(c) establishment of a core team of national execution trainers; and
(d) preparation of an action plan for improved training in national execution.

B. Training

27. Formal project training (primarily in-country, short- and longer-term overseas fellowships) accounted for $7 million or 11 per cent of IPF commitments for the period July 1991 to December 1993. Increased resources are to be directed at training, focusing particularly on in-country training and women. Noting that the impact of overseas training is often less than expected owing to the quality and tenure of the candidates selected, Government guidelines on the procedures and requirements for externally funded training are to be more rigorously applied, particularly as they concern candidate selection, time limits and after-training procedures. Corrective action is to be taken in cases where these guidelines are not followed.

28. Since the start of the programme, approximately 50 per cent of overseas fellowships have been to destinations within the region whereas the remainder are largely accounted for by destinations in Europe and North America. The mid-term review supported the proposal that due consideration be given to the use of in-country training as appropriate, recognizing the far higher costs involved in external training. Where external training is warranted, preference is to be given to training opportunities within the region, where available. It was agreed that training and study tours should be confined to counterparts working directly on the projects and expected to remain on them after completion of the relevant training.

C. Modalities for providing expertise

29. The provision of international expertise has accounted so far for 76 per cent of expenditure, with the remainder accounted for by national experts. The high cost of international experts and the cost-efficiency of national experts are further underscored when the comparable person/month percentages for the same expenditure are examined, namely 70 per cent for national experts and 21 per cent for international experts for the period July 1991 to December 1993. Preference of national experts over international experts where suitably qualified and available is to be further promoted. Similarly, the trend away from long-term international project managers towards national project directors is welcomed. In both cases, qualified women will be encouraged to participate. A system for evaluating consultant performance as the basis for payment and further rostering was agreed and will be operationalized in the format presented in the joint issues paper.

30. Bangladesh is a major contributor to the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme globally through the provision of qualified professionals. There are currently some 250 Bangladeshi candidates on roster with UNV Geneva and some 90 Bangladeshi serving as UNV specialists world wide. An evaluation is to be conducted to determine what role these returnees can and do play in the national development process. This will be an input into the preparation of future UNDP cooperation with Bangladesh.

31. Within Bangladesh, the fielding of UNV specialists has been limited although it is recognized that there is potential for their increased use in areas in which qualified Bangladeshis are not otherwise available, or through the UNV Domestic Development Services (DDS) programme. Similary, the United Nations International Short-term Advisory Resources (UNISTAR) remains untapped. Although the Transfer of Knowledge through Expatriate Nationals (TOKTEN) modality has proven popular, there is a need to orient TOKTEN consultancies more effectively in support of programme objectives and national priorities as well as to improve the monitoring and placement of consultants.

32. Bangladesh has participated in a large number of technical cooperation among developing countries (TCDC) capacity needs matching exercises from which several cooperation activities have emerged. In 1993 alone, it participated in 13 such exercises in Asia and Africa. The country hosted its first capacity needs matching exercise on "Rural Credit for Poverty Alleviation" in September 1994.

33. UNDP will continue to respond to Government requests for assistance in procuring specialized expertise and expert services from the United Nations under the above-mentioned modalities with the proviso that steps are taken to ensure that these services are much better focused and more closely integrated in future into the mainstream of programme and project activities of the fifth country programme.

D. Parallel processes

34. UNDP projects are implemented in accordance with project documents formally approved by the Government, UNDP and the executing agency. In Bangladesh, project documents are normally based on Government technical assistance project pro-forma documents prepared by a Government department/ministry, approved by the Planning Commission, and subsequently endorsed by the Economic Relations Division prior to submission to UNDP or another donor in the form of a funding request. In exceptional cases, project documents are prepared in advance of the pro-forma documents in full consultation with the Government.

35. Delays in the processing of one or the other of these two documents has resulted in long lead times in the approval and start-up of UNDP-funded projects. Specific recommendations have been agreed in the mid-term review to improve Government and UNDP coordination has been agreed in the preparation of the technical assistance project pro-forma and project documents as well as introduce specific time frames for individual steps in the appraisal and approval process. It was agreed that whenever a project concept is proposed that has not already been identified in the country programme document, the Economic Relations Division will convene a meeting with representatives from the concerned Ministry, Planning Commission and UNDP to agree on the concept prior to the preparation of any pro-forma or project document.

36. The project tripartite review meeting is to be more effectively used in decision-taking relating to ongoing projects. In particular, the terms of reference for these reviews are to be made more explicit. In short, the monitoring of UNDP projects has to be substantially strengthened to implement the projects in time. Extensions might be resorted to only in highly exceptional cases.

IV. KEY CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE MID-TERM REVIEW MEETING

37. The following is a summary of the key recommendations and conclusions of the meeting:

(a) The revised objectives of the country programme as endorsed by the mid-term review are: (i) poverty alleviation; (ii) environment and natural resource management; and (iii) public management. Participatory development is recognized as an underlying theme of the entire programme;

(b) The programme is to be concentrated, more sharply focused on sustainable human development priorities and more precisely targeted to impact on the poorest, especially poor women. For this purpose, the criteria for concentration presented in the joint issues paper (minus the weightage system) are to be used as a guideline for project selection, as well as for future project formulation, appraisal and evaluation;

(c) Task force recommendations on capacity-building are agreed upon. These include: the setting of numeric baselines and success criteria for capacity-building in all new programme documents; the strengthening of national

capacity for project management; measures for more systematically assessing the performance of national consultants; and action to suspend projects temporarily for which counterpart personnel are not provided on a timely basis;

(d) The Government and UNDP are to work more closely with private organizations (community-based organizations, NGOs, private sector) in reaching and involving ultimate target beneficiaries in programme interventions. Accepted task force recommendations include: drawing from the experience of successful partnerships between Government and such organizations, as well as the inclusion of private organizations in capacity-building activities;

(e) Task force recommendations on gender in development are agreed upon. These include: preparation of gender-disaggregated data and affirmative action for women in all future projects, along with specific measures for increasing the number of women recruited and targeting of women in UNDP-funded training programmes. Progress will be critically reviewed through regular monitoring and evaluation mechanisms;

(f) National execution is to be rigorously promoted, supported by appropriate training activities;

(g) Government and UNDP guidelines on training are to be strictly adhered to. Preference is to be given to increasing the use of in-country training. Where overseas training is warranted, preference is to be given to training in the region, where available. The training of women is to be particularly promoted;

(h) UNV, TOKTEN and UNISTAR activities are to be better focused in line with country programme objectives;

(i) Task force recommendations on parallel processes have been accepted. These include: closer cooperation between the Government's formulation of technical assistance project pro-forma documents and formulation of the UNDP project document; specified time-frames for the various stages of project processing and approval with a view to shortening long lead times; and more effective use of the tripartite review as a decision-taking mechanism for ongoing projects. As regards new project proposals not identified in the country programme document, the Economic Relations Division will convene a meeting of the concerned Ministry, the Planning Commission and UNDP to agree on the project concept prior to the preparation of a technical assistance project programme or project document.

V. FOLLOW-UP ACTION

38. Follow-up actions highlighted in the mid-term review meeting are:

(a) The task force modality is to be continued for the further elaboration of recommendations where required, and for coordinating and monitoring the implementation of mid-term review decisions;

(b) The task force modality is also to be used in preparing the next phase of UNDP cooperation with Bangladesh.

VI. EXECUTIVE BOARD ACTION

39. The Executive Board may wish to take note of the present report.

Annex I

FINANCIAL SUMMARY

I. RESOURCES

A. Resources available for country programme period

	$	$
IPF	100 423 000 a/	
Estimated cost-sharing	8 163 000	
Joint programme funding	-	
Total		108 586 000 a/

B. Commitments

Approved programme/project budgets b/		
Approved and allocated IPF	87 077 000	
Approved and unallocated IPF	-	
		87 077 000
Approved and allocated cost-sharing	8 163 000	
Approved and unallocated cost-sharing	-	
		8 163 000
Pipeline programme/projects		
IPF	5 806 000	
Cost-sharing	-	5 806 000
Total		101 046 000

C. Balance of resources available for further programming

IPF	7 540 000
Cost-sharing	-
Balance of resources available	7 540 000 c/

a/ Compared to the $133.75 million originally anticipated for the fifth country programme; the reduction results from the 70 per cent IPC programming limitation.

b/ "Approved and allocated" refer to those programmes and projects approved by the Action Committee or Bureau PAC for which there exist detailed, signed documents and budgets. "Approved and unallocated: represent the balance of funds available to the programme or project which have yet to be reflected in specific budget lines.

c/ This figure represents the net balance of IPF and cost-sharing resources available plus joint programme funding less approved and allocated/unallocated IPF and cost-sharing funding less pipeline IPF and cost-sharing.

II. PROPOSED (P) AND ACTUAL (A) ALLOCATION OF RESOURCES BY AREA OF CONCENTRATION a/, b/

(Thousands of dollars)

Areas of concentration	IPF		COST SHARING		TOTAL		PERCENT OF TOTAL	
	(P)	(A)	(P)	(A)	(P)	(A)	(P)	(A)
Poverty alleviation	28 120	17 862	804	1 962	28 924	19 824	28	20
Environment and natural resource management	38 160	38 285	1 140	5 581	39 300	43 866	38	43
Economic management and administrative reform	27 110	25 075	610	0	27 720	25 075	27	25
Unprogrammed reserve (others)	7 033	11 661	210	294	7 243	11 955	7	12
Total	100 423	92 883	2 764	7 837	103 187	100 720	100	100

a/ Taking into account 30 per cent reduction of IPF for fifth cycle.

b/ The difference between P and A is yet to be allocated.

III. ESTIMATED COMPLEMENTARY ASSISTANCE FROM OTHER SOURCES

(Thousands of dollars)

	At the time of formulation of country programme	At time of mid-term review
UNDP-administered funds		
CDF	20 000	17 000
SPR		936
Other United Nations resources		
Non-United Nations resources		
SPR		325
UNROB		1 900
CIDA		442
Total	20 000	20 603

Annex II

SELECTION CRITERIA

Criterion

A. WHAT?

1. How directly do the project/programme's outputs relate to the country programme objectives in:

   (a) Poverty alleviation

   (b) Environmental and natural resources management

   (c) Public management?

2. Is it clearly oriented towards technical cooperation as opposed to capital assistance?

3. Is it environmentally friendly?

4. What is the potential for it to create institutional/social capacity in order to ensure sustainability beyond the life of the intervention, without/with minimal external assistance?

5. Does it directly enhance human development performance as measured against the four main human development indicators?

B. WHO?

6. (a) Are the hard core poorest targeted as ultimate beneficiaries of project/programme assistance with explicit indication as to how it is to impact on them?

   (b) If yes to 6 (a), are women specifically identified within this group?

7. Will it directly target women through affirmative action?

8. Does it promote better public management with strong potential for widespread benefits to the majority of the people?

C. HOW?

9. Will the project/programme enable the intended beneficiaries of project/programme to participate meaningfully in its design, implementation, management, monitoring?

10. Will it directly facilitate the involvement of private organizations?

11. (For ongoing projects/programmes) is it progressing satisfactorily towards the achievement of its objectives?

12. Is it nationally executed?